

Process for Writing Rubrics

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Explanation and Considerations for Use

This document, adapted from *Classroom Assessment for Student Learning: Doing It Right—Using It Well*, describes a widely accepted, multi-step process for writing rubrics, beginning with instructions for initial drafting, revising, benchmarking, and refining. It can provide a general model for schools looking to write rubrics as part of their portfolio development process.

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Process for Writing Rubrics

The following steps can be used to develop rubrics for any product or performance:

1. Write first draft
2. Gather samples of student work
3. Sort samples of student work by level of quality
4. Group the features of levels of student work into traits
5. Identify student work samples that illustrate each level
6. Revise your rubric (Stiggins et al., 2004)

This process is described in more detail below:

Write First Draft

The first step in rubric development often draws from “theoretical” or abstract sources: teachers’ prior knowledge about quality performance on a task, state standards or curricula, research on learning or assessment, sample rubrics developed in other contexts, etc. Using these sources, rubric developers typically develop an initial rubric that consists of an organized list of the features of student performance at different levels of performance.

However, this version of a rubric should be considered the first draft. Using samples of actual student work, rubrics can be greatly improved over time.

Gather Samples of Student Work

Once a task is administered, teachers will have access to multiple samples of student work for the task. At this point, student work representing a wide range of performance levels should be gathered for analysis. This collection of student work samples will be extremely useful for refining and revising the draft rubrics for any task.

Sort Student Work Samples by Level of Quality

The next step is to sort the student work samples according to level of quality (e.g. Proficient, Mid-Range, Emergent or Exceeds Standard, Meets Standard, Approaching Standard). Without looking at the scores that may have been previously assigned to these samples of student work, teachers should categorize the work samples according to the levels of quality.

Once student works samples have been categorized, teachers should study the samples to determine the characteristics that separate one level of quality from the next. They should write down their reasons for placing samples in one category or another and list detailed descriptors of performance at the different levels of quality. As much as

possible, general descriptors such as “lacks fluency” should be replaced by detailed descriptors such as “speaks slowly with hesitation” (Stiggins et al, 2004).

Group the Features of Levels of Student Work into Traits

At this point, you will find that your long list of descriptors contains many terms that are redundant or overlapping. This is the time to eliminate or consolidate redundant descriptors. At the same time, this is the step where teachers should look at the entire list of descriptors to identify broad dimensions of performance (or traits) that emerge out of the descriptor list. These may be the same traits that were in your original draft rubric, or they may be new traits that were not evident until actual student work samples were examined.

Identify Student Work Samples that Illustrate Each Level

Return to the student work samples that were grouped according to levels of quality, and identify those samples that illustrate particularly well the performance levels and traits you have identified. These samples of student work can then serve as *models*, *exemplars*, *examples*, *anchors*, or *benchmarks* and can be used for professional development in the school and for training rates to evaluate student performance on tasks.

Revise Your Rubric

Using the traits identified in previous steps of the rubric revision process, add, delete, or merge traits into the original, draft rubric. Use the descriptors that emerged from this process to refine or add to the descriptors that appear in the original rubric, as well. It is also important to examine the rubric for parallel content, to ensure that descriptors at one performance level are represented at the other levels, too.

While time-consuming, the rubric revision process described above will result in a vastly improved rubric that is clearer and easier for students, teachers, and raters to use and understand. The dialogue and analysis inherent in this process will also help participating teachers increase the consistency of their assessment of student work over time, students, and courses.

Source: Stiggins, R.J., Arter, J.A., Chappuis, J. and Chappuis, S. (2004). *Classroom Assessment for Student Learning: Doing It Right—Using It Well*. Portland, OR: Assessment Training Institute, Inc.